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ABSTRACT

When students are tardy or absent, or when they drop out of school, sequential learning cannot occur, subject matter and skills cannot be developed, and much student talent is wasted. At-risk students identified in the school setting include those exhibiting signs of alcohol consumption, drug abuse, or antisocial behavior. These students need assistance to overcome their problems and to achieve in school. When counseling in the school setting is not sufficient, these students need to be referred to appropriate services in the community. For some high school students, the immediate earnings from employment seem more significant than staying in school. These students need courses in vocational education and assistance to help them develop positive attitudes toward education, perceive alternatives to dropping out, and realize the worth of long-term goals. Pregnant teenage girls, also at risk of dropping out, need counseling services to help them obtain their diplomas, learn job skills, and cope with their situations. Family situations, such as cultural differences between values taught at home and at school, separation, divorce, or a parent's loss of employment, can put students at risk of dropping out. School personnel need to determine causes of tardiness, absenteeism, and dropping out, and to provide necessary remediation. (NB)

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SCHOOL DROPOUTS, ABSENTEEISM, AND TARDINESS

[Marlow Ediger]

Much discussion and written content in professional journals and teacher education textbooks are in evidence pertaining to school dropouts, absenteeism, and tardiness of students in school. Much talent of students is wasted when the three concepts of dropping out of school, being absent, or exhibiting tardy behavior occurs. Sequential learning for students cannot occur under these conditions. Vital subject matter and skills are not being developed. Gaps exist in terms of goal attainment. Meaning attached to content and abilities being emphasized in the classroom are omitted. What is taught may then not make sense to the student. Understanding of learning opportunities is being minimized. Interest in learning, no doubt, wanes much. The new subject matter and skills being presented are not of interest due to meaning and understanding of sequential goals not being inherent within the student.

The School Dropout

At risk students are being identified more frequently than ever before in the school setting. Students plagued with drug abuse, alcholic consumption, and anti-social behavior need

identification and assistance. These students, in particular, need assistance and guidance. They should not be minimized and left to fend for thenselves. Merely having counselors, psychologists, and teachers there to work with at risk students is not adequate. Concerned, competent professionals, rather, need to identify and attempt to solve the school dropout problem. Even with concerned, competent counnselors, school psychologists, and classroom teachers, the odds are overwhelming in assisting students not to drop out of school.

School dropouts, in general, have little to look forward to. There are individuals who have become famous and wealthy and had dropped out of school. The majority, however, have little to offer society in the way of attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

At risk students who are plagued with problems of drug and alcoholic abuse, as well as behavior detrimental to themselves need assistance to overcome their problems. The use of drugs and alcoholic beverages tends to make for specific kinds of student behavior. These include:

1. loss of interest in school.
2. changes in personality.
3. rebellion in the home setting.
4. avoidance of responsibility.
5. cutting classes in school.
6. frequent tardiness in school.
7. lack of being in touch with reality.
8. change and avoidance of friendship.
9. turn to crime to support expensive chemical

dependence habits.

10. inability to recall previous happenings.

At risk students with the above named problems may well be beyond the reach of what the school can provide in terms of services. However, shcool officials have definite responsibilities to identify chemically dependent students and provide the necessary counseling services in the educational arena. Referrals beyond what the school can do must be made to responsive agencies and institutions in society. Rehabilitation of the drug and alcohol abuser is necessary before any student can achieve in the school and classroom setting.

Anti-social behavior of students can be detected at a relatively young age. The pupil who is at risk of being a dropout due to anti-social behavior reveals the following behaviors:

1. enjoys being cruel to others in school and in society.
2. desires to inflict physical pain to others.
3. is extremely quarrelsome and aggressive.
4. reveals rebellious behavior to school officials and law enforcement agencies.
5. lacks any form of control from parents.
6. eggs other students on to becoming involved in fighting.
7. steals from pupils and others in society.
8. tells lies to cover up undesirable personal behavior.

9. indicates violent behavior on the playground.

10. carries knives and other objects to inflict harm to peers and others in society.

The pupil with anti-social behavior needs early identification. These pupils need assistance from school counselors and psychologists. The anti-social behavior needs solutions to identified problems. The negative behavior may be beyond what the school can offer in terms of remediation. Quality agencies and professionals beyond school officials must then be consulted. Anti-social behavior can disrupt classroom behavior until little time is spent on task by pupils in goal attainment. Disruptive students need a specific environment which does not hinder others from learning.

At risk students dependent upon drugs or alcohol, as well as exhibiting anti-social behavior, need to experience the following:

1. objectives which are attainable in teaching-learning situations.

2. learning opportunities which are meaningful, have purpose, and possess interest.

3. provision made for students of diverse ability and achievement levels.

4. evaluation procedures which diagnose problems in learning for the student.

5. success in learning which is in evidence for students.

Specially trained teachers with low pupil-instructor ratio need to assist at risk students to attain as much as possible on an individual basis.

The World of Work as a Goal

Selected students cannot wait to get into the world of work. They desire to earn money instead of attending school. For these dropouts, the school and classroom setting is not exactly negative. However, work and earning money overides the goals of receiving a formal education. A male student may have to support an automobile. To support this interest, a job and money are necessary. Eventually, dropping out of school might become a major objective. Both male and female students may enjoy work more so than being a student in school. Immediate gains from the world of work and earned money are perceived as being more significant than long term goals of receiving a high school diploma.

High school students leaning toward dropping out of formal programs of education and towards getting a full time job need to be identified and assisted in the following ways:

1. courses in vocational education as well as the basics (reading, writing, computing, science, and the social studies) must meet the needs of each potential dropout.

2. positive attitudes toward the academic areas, as well as toward careers in the world of work need adequate emphasis.

3. students need assistance to perceive the worth of long term goals, such as high school completion, rather than immediate goals of earning money.

4. guidance needs to be provided to potential dropouts to perceive alternatives to being school dropouts. Dropping out of school may indeed be disasterous.

Students Lack Purpose in School

Students who do not perceive purpose in a formal education may elect to be absent or tardy, as much as is possible. Parents who fail to support school attendance definitely aid purposeless students to be absent and tardy. Increased absenteeism and tardiness eventually may lead to being a school dropout.

Potential dropouts who fail to perceive purpose in receiving a high school diploma need to be

1. assisted to perceive the values of receiving an education.
2. guided to achieve sequential achievement in school.
3. encouraged by parents to complete requirements in school work. Parents must help their children to be in school each day and be there on time, unless emergencies occur.
4. rewarded for regular attendance in school.
5. accepted as human beings having worth. A curriculum needs to be developed which is adapted to the potential high school dropout.

Pregnant Teenage Girls in High School

Teenage pregnancy of unmarried girls appears to be epidenic in society. These girls face a difficult lot in life. The parent(s) may not want to have a teenage, unmarried pregnant girl in the house. Or the girl chooses not to live with her parents. The father of the unborn or born child generally avoids and shuns responsibilities here. The girl

must then fend for herself, unless an abortion has occurred. The teenager is left with few options, in many cases. Her friends may tend to go on through the high school years and attempt to find meaning in life.

The high school may well be an agency that can assist the pregnant teenager to complete the formal years of schooling to receive a high school diploma or its equivalent. Counseling services should be available. The teenage girl needs to understand her options. She needs training in vocational education to secure a job. Or, if abilities and motivations are there, the pregnant teenager needs to know which higher education choices are possible. Talent must not go to waste.

Pregnant teenagers in high school need to experience

1. acceptance and understanding from peers, teachers, and counselors.
2. a sequential academic and/or vocational curriculum.
3. success in completing course requirements.
4. dialog with their parents. The school may have to provide the bridge between the pregnant teenager and parents.
5. assistance in securing a job.

Culture and the Value of Education

Culture clash may exist between the school and the home. The school setting can strongly convey to students the high worth of completing high school requirements. The parents in the home setting may also minimize education and its values non-verbally, as well as verbally. Parents might have

experienced problems and hardships in school. They may feel that formal schooling has little to recommend itself, rightly or wrongly.

Perhaps, parents directly or indirectly encourage the son or daughter to drop out of school. Reasons might be given by the parents for this situation, such as the high school student is needed at home to help take care of a large family, or to earn money to assist in supporting the family. In situations such as these, the student may be absent, as well as tardy frequently from school, prior to dropping out.

The school certainly has increased responsibilities heaped upon then, such as attempting to prevent absenteeism, tardiness, and dropping out of school on the part of the student. Where parents are very lukewarm or negative toward what a school can do to assist the son or daughter to achieve, the following recommendations are made:

1. talk to the parents to show data on how regular school attendance can help the potential dropout.

2. work with the parents to modify negative views they may have about high school and formal education in general.

3. help the student to make sequential progress in school.

4. assist the student to budget time properly if he/she has a part time job or works hard at tasks within a difficult family situation.

The Disintegrating Family

At risk families provide problem situations for the student in school. Separation or divorce is a very common occurrence in society. Selected experts in compiling statistics quote a forty to fifty per cent divorce rate within marriages. Separation and divorce may cause extreme difficulties to students in these family situations. Tension and anxiety occur. Instability in the life of the student occurs. The student may be used as a pawn between the father and the mother in a divorce situation. Many times income levels fall tremendously when the father and mother have separate homes after a divorce. Visitation rites may cause friction and extreme disagreements. The student might have preferred custody with one parent and yet custody was given to the other parent. Accusations and mistruths are told to the offspring about the other parent. The son or daughter is caught in the middle of the dissension. School progress and achievement suffer much. It might be impossible for the student to concentrate on class work in school.

When separation or divorce of parents occur, the school has a difficult task in working with students caught in these dilemma situations. The school may do the following:

1. realize that the involved son or daughter may be suffering much mental anguish in separation or divorce proceedings.

2. accept the fact that a new life style will be in evidence for the student. The level of income may fall

tremendously for the parent receiving custody. The other parent may drop out of the bitter situation in whole or part. Usually, the mother receives custody of the child. The father may face a difficult situation in visitation rites and drops out of the drama, partially or en toto.

3. try to work with both the custodial and non-custodial parent in assisting their offspring to achieve as much as possible. Provide adequate support and attention to the student whose parents have and are experiencing marital problems.

Loss of Jobs and Earning Power of Parents

Instability of jobs and vocations in society makes for problems in income security. Places of employment experience hard times or close voluntarily. The place of employment may incorporate with a parent firm in another city or state. There may be lower wage and fringe benefits for the worker. A parent or both parents may have very low paying jobs. Losing a job or earning less income may well provide considerable stress in a family. If one parent alone is able to maintain employment, the earning power might be very minimal to a family.

Automation, computers, reorganization, and less spending of federal moneys domestically within a nation or state may make for increased unemployment. Fear of losing a job further hinders parents from meeting the needs of family members. What might the school do to help students and their families in an unstable situation in the world of work?

1. understand the trying time when a family experiences employment loss and dwindling income.

2. assist the student to achieve as much as abilities permit. These students, along with the others, need to be ready to compete in the job market, as well as to become productive members in society.

3. be a source of inspiration to students whose parents have lost jobs and a decline in monetary resources.

4. attach meaning to the concept of poverty of students and their families. Poverty is one of the greatest evils facing human beings and their potential to develop well.

Additional Problem Areas and Assistance to Students

There are numerous other problems faced by students. These problematic areas may well make for situations in life involving possible absenteeism, tardiness, and dropouts from school.

1. continued long term illness of a parent or the student.

2. child abuse in the home setting.

3. substance abuse by parents.

In closing, teachers, principals, and guidance counselors need to develop feelings of empathy and humaness, particularly to students facing grave problems in life. Calloused, indifferent school officials need to be weeded out of the profession of teaching and education. The human condition demands that teachers, principals, and guidance counselors;

1. work with each student to attain optimally.

2. realize negative situations which hinder persons from learning as much as possible.

3. provide support and encouragement to students who are facing personal problems.

4. harmonize goals with parents to provide the best education possible for their offspring.

Causes for absenteeism, tardiness, and dropouts need to be determined to the best possible. Remediation endeavors should follow. Much effort, time, and responsibility are expanded in assisting students to being in school, as well as being there on time. Each student has much worth and must be guided to stay in school, as long as is feasible and humanly possible.